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Engineer gets life term in plot to spy for Soviets

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — An aerospace engineer who admitted trying to sell Stealth bomber secrets to the Soviet Union was sentenced yesterday to life in prison.

U.S. District Judge Matthew Byrne Jr. said he hoped the harsh sentence would deter others from betraying their country.

Byrne imposed two concurrent life terms after Thomas Patrick Cavanagh, 40, close to tears, apologized to his nation and his co-workers for what he called "my disgraceful actions."

"The sorrow and remorse I feel are beyond words," Cavanagh said. "I shamed my father's honorable name."

He stood before the judge in a gray prison jumpsuit and asked Byrne to consider the unblemished life he had led before he attempted to pay off his debts by selling the Stealth bomber secrets.

"I respectfully throw myself on the mercy of the court and pray that the first 40 years of my life count for something," Cavanagh said.

Byrne's sentence was more severe than the 99-year term the govern-

ment had recommended.

"Quite frankly, Mr. Cavanagh is a traitor," Assistant U.S. Attorney Percy Anderson had told the judge.

Byrne said, "I don't think there's any question these materials were highly secret and, if disclosed to a foreign power, did represent significant damage to the interests of the United States."

Cavanagh, of suburban Downey, pleaded guilty March 13 to two counts of espionage and said that money was his motivation.

He was accused of taking blueprints and documents of the bomber, which is designed to make the aircraft invisible to enemy radar, from Northrop Corp. where he worked as an engineer.

During a December meeting with undercover FBI agents, Cavanagh said the information on the Stealth program was worth "billions of dollars," court documents said.

In his confession, Cavanagh said he was handed \$25,000 and promised an additional \$30,000 in the deal by men he thought were Soviet agents — but who actually were undercover FBI agents — before his arrest in December.